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## Specimens

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## Specimens

### Abstract

A short rumination on specimens

### Keywords

Science, Policy, Bioethics

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## Specimens

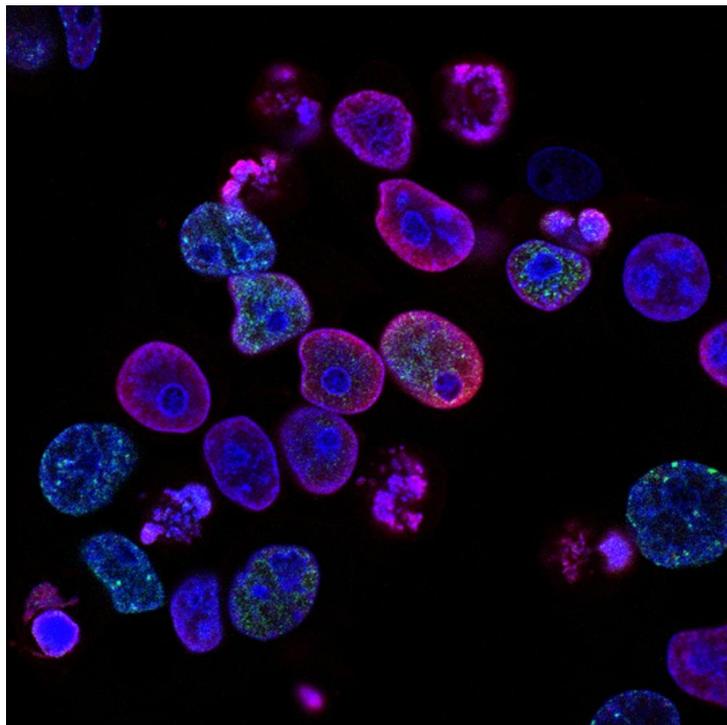
*Sara Kapadia*

The word specimen originates from the Latin word *specere*, which means “to look.”

Ever since the dawn of time humans have been looking, where we choose to cast our gaze focuses our attention on that particular thing. Sometimes we look out of curiosity, sometimes we look out of sheer need.

2020 has brought a great need for specimens, every COVID test involves a specimen. Countless cells have passed through laboratories. Countless specimens. How many of those specimens sealed the fate of the anxious patients?

Electron microscopes are extremely useful in visualizing biological specimens by viewing the cells up close and in excruciating detail. The challenge is to preserve the specimen while also being prepared for viewing in the microscope. There is a subtle balance between preservation and



preparation.

*Human cancer cells treated with a topoisomerase inhibitor and an inhibitor of the protein kinase. Cell nuclei are stained blue; the chromosomal protein histone gamma-H2AX marks DNA damage in red and foci of DNA replication in green. Created by Yves Pommier, Rozenn Josse, 2014*

What we see on the surface is quite different to what we discover up close. What is a specimen? Is it part of the organism it came from? Is it no longer a part of it? Who does the specimen belong to?

“Advances in medicine often depend on the effective collection, storage, research use, and sharing of human biological specimens and associated data. But what about the sources of such specimens? When a blood specimen is drawn from a vein in your arm, is that specimen still you? Is it your property, intellectual or otherwise? Should you be allowed not only to consent to its use in research but also to specify under what circumstances it may be used?” (Lynch, Bierer, Cohen & Rivera, 2017, p. 1)

I often wonder how many specimens we unknowingly leave behind. In the grocery store, on public transportation, just randomly going about our days. They are out there, our specimens, pieces of ourselves.

## References

Lynch, H.F., Bierer, B. E., Cohen, I.G., Rivera, S.M. (Ed.) (2017) *Specimen Science: Ethics and Policy Implications*. The MIT Press